CRITICAL DIGEST

Vol V No 26 March 9,1953

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current NYC & LA Entertainment Scene
25¢ per copy...$10 per year...505-5th Ave,NYC...T.M. Kraus,Editor MU 2-0326

NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

Starting with next week's issue "Critical Digest" will come to you in a new,easy to read,easy to handle format. Instead of its present mimeo make-up, which has tended toward the bulky side recently, CD will be presented in a neat 4 page offset folder. The same number of words and features will be included in the new format as are usually covered. This week,due to the change-over,certain departments have been dropped. But starting with the March 16 issue all of the regular departments,plus several new ones,will appear weekly. We hope that the new format and new features will prove to make CD more interesting and useful.

NYC Theatre Reviews-Current Digests

Merchant of Venice-City Center 2/4/53. Majority of daily critics thought final production of NYC Theatre Company season was poorly acted and poorly directed,Coleman,Mirror, and Sheaffer,Eagle,were only critics to find any merit in Albert Marre's version of Shakespeare drama which stars Luther Adler and Margaret Phillips in a limited engagement. Latter highly praised Adler and Phillip Bourneuf's persuasive acting. But remainder of reviewers differed widely in their views of Adler's portrayal of Shylock and Phillips portrayal of Portia. Atkinson,Times,who found entire production "interesting" thought Adler hum-drum and colorless. Kerr,Herald Tribune, noted again that company has no one to lift the lighter passages of the Bard into exhilarating melody,except Bourneuf. Production is choppily assembled,uncertainly staged and infrequently illuminating,panned Chapman,News. Watts,Post,thought Phillips was too casual in her portayal, while Adler provided the only real moments of interest. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, might have okayed production for those who are not familiar with the script. McClain,Journal American,could find nothing distinghished about the production, including Lemuel Ayers sets.

Wonderful Town- Winter Garden 2/25/53. It's still unanimous. All of the weekly reviewers who have filed verdicts on the Robert Fryer musical version of "My Sister Eileen" found it fine,if not downright wonderful. Seconding Atkinson,Times,nomination for Rosalind Russell for President in 1956, Keating,Cue, billed show as the kind of happy piece which sends you home wishing there had been a 3rd act. Star's ability to mix broad comedy with genuine pathos is a gift not often found onstage, lauds Gibbs,New Yorker. Time and Newsweek aisle sitters joined in praising all concerned,including Edith Adams in the role of the sister, Raoul Pene du Bois inspired sets and costumes, George Abbott's direction, book by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov and music and lyrics by Leonard Bernstein and Betty Comden and Adolph Green. Hobe,Variety,also lauded everyone,but threw in question of exactly how long the star's health may be able to stand the pace. Billboard's newsitter remarked that show's top asset is its wonderful balance, with every element measured out to just the right proportions.

Off Broadway Notes

Circle in Square group have worked out repertory idea for TV which has two networks interested...Spanish language musical will be put into production by Felix Angelo, a TV director in Havana. He is now in NYC looking for an off broad way theatre seating 400...Kerr,Herald Tribune,will speak in Shakespeare Festival program at Hofstra,LI, College April 25...The Late George Apley revived by National Arts Club under direction of Colin Craig...City College's Theatre Workshop produces Shaw's The Devil's Disciple March 13-15 at Pauline Edwards Theatre,23rd and Lexington...A City Love Story, new play by Michael Shurtleff, produced at Gellendre Theatrical Studios March 18-April 12,39 West 67...The Cellar, new play by Loften Mitchell, presented at People's Showcase Theatre,all negro company,at 290 Lenox Ave...Maxwell Anderson's Truckline Cafe,the play which launched a verbal battle between the playwright and the critics, presented at Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre...The Rivals presented weekends at Provincetown Repertory Theatre ...Minian's Rainbow Equity Community Theatre production plays at Bryant Youth and Adult Center,LI City, March 13-14

Vaudeville Notes

New Paramount stage show features Skitch Henderson,his piano and orchestra, Morey Amsterdam, and Monica Lewis...New Radio City Music Hall show is a Leonidoff revue entitled "Continental". Shyrettos, James McCracken, Eileen O Dare are featured with the regular company...Danny Kaye,who appears as guest of NY Drama Desk, luncheon club of NY Theatre reporters and editors , March 16, has had RKO Palace re-named for the duration of his run the "R-Kaye-O Palace."

TV & Radio Theatre Notes

NBC Radio "Critic At Large" with Leon Pearson commenting on theatre,films,books now heard Fri at 10 PM EST...WINS Martin Starr began his 6th year as station's drama and film critic by switching to 7 30 PM Mon to Fri...NBC Radio "Best Plays" returns to air April 24,Fri at 9 PM, first production of new series to be Mr. Roberts... Broadway TV Theatre now heard Sat & Sun matinees on WOR TV, as well as Mon to Fri at 7 30 PM. Plans underway by producer of show Warren Wade to tour casts of shows to stations throughout the country. Whistling in Dark is current production... WNYC presenting series of 13Comedie Francaise plays,starting with Moliere's Les Femmes Savantes,heard Sats at 2 PM...Avon and Longacre theatres,recently used for radio,have been released by networks and are available for theatre bookings... NBC TV will feature 2 hour production of Hamlet with Maurice Evans on Sunday, April 26 from 5 to 7 PM EST...Alice Ghostley,New Faces, featured on CBS TV Freedom Rings series...CBS TV Toast of Town presented scene from Time Out for Ginger... Plan to present Gigi via closed circuit TV presented to Actors Equity.

LA Theatre Notes

Gigi with Audrey Hepburn opens at Biltmore March 12...Maurice Schwartz opens hisCivic Playhouse English Speaking company March 11 with Take Now Thy Son...Drama Guild,formed by Russell Lewis and Howard Young,to stage drama readings with stars.

' Green Room Department '

DRAMA CRITICS' CRITIC...NY Herald Tribune promotion ad is bound to cause extended comment among critical fraternity. It reads: "The drama critics' critic,meaning the man whose sense of theater values is as sharp as they come, is generally conceded to be the Herald Tribune's Walter F. Kerr. You won't always see him quoted on the blurb billboards--but you hear him quoted by those whose play judgement is seasoned,sound and sure. Walter F. Kerr writes for the more critical."

THEATRE THOUGHTS...Newest excuse added for lack of mid-March theatre business by Watt,News,is relayed from company manager of a current drama who decided the usual excuses--lull before holidays,lull after holidays, income tax lull, Lenten lull,etc--were insufficient. It's the beginning of the trout season, he reasons,and everybody's gone fishing.

CRITICS AT WORK...Theatre Arts' George Spelvin charge that Francis,Billboard,gives everybody on Broadway a Donaldson Award Ballot were denied by Csida,Billboard. Facts are only 1 bartender and 1 cabdriver have every received ballots,and then for good reason...Critics are the only soft and sympathetic romanticists connected with theatre,one of the most selfish,unfeeling and heartless fields,notes Watts,Post...Midnight broadcaster Henry Morgan, WMGM, urged by Abel,Variety,to reappraise his sometimes apparent lack of balance. This is especially true when he sometimes assumes role of drama critic on topics he knows nothing about.

MISCONTEXTED QUOTES..."Awe-inspiring" are words credited to Winsten,Post, in quote ads in praise of "Above and Beyond" film. Actually critic recalls that original review,filed under happy typo "Above and Behind", the word referred to scenes of the Hiroshima atomic explosion,and not the entire picture. Now he can only shudder for the duration of the ad and the memory of it.

MAIL BOX...Times Drama Mailbag has ode to ladies from male reader who feels NYC critics haven't given women a fair break in their reviews. Vanessa Brown,Seven Year Itch, and Phyllis Hill, The Fifth Season, deserved more mention in the opening night reviews than mere mentions,he feels.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Geraldine Page's father doesn't think very much of the acting profession,Mid Summer star,told Sheaffer,Eagle. Her father thought she should write,not act. But the actress thinks the actor has the power over the writer because an actor can twist the words and make them mean exactly the opposite of what the writer intended...Cities around the country are not just dots on maps, they are places packed with personality,and with enthusiastic but discriminating playgoers, Shepard Traube told Coleman,Mirror. The producer of Bell,Book and Candle has returned from a road tour with his show.

BROADWAY GRIPE BOX...Starting with the next issue,March 16, entertainment workers and fans are invited to file "Gripes" against critics, general and/or specfic in "Broadway Gripe Box" % "Critical Digest", 505-5thAve,NYC. Identity of gripers will be held confidential,but each letter must be signed and must have proper home address. Best 3 gripes of week, in opinion of editor,will receive a new theatre book.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Porgy & Bess played pre-opening Monday "Professional Performance" matinee for theatre workers. Drama reviewers attended this performance...The Children's Hour plays 2 performances Sundays...Winter Garden lobby has loudspeakers informing potential ticket buyers for Wonderful Town...Nat Kahn,Variety,named Hollywood Reporter, Editor.

' Anta Forum On Evoking New Interests of Public '

Interesting and unusual plans were suggested by panel seeking answer to ANTA forum topic " What Kind of Theatre Will Evoke New Interest From American Public." Discussion, sponsored by the Greater NY Chapter of ANTA at the ANTA Playhouse, was the 6th in this season's series of 8. Forum heard John Burrell, Old Vic director, Geraldine Page, Mid-Summer, Neva Patterson, The Seven Year Itch, and Henry Hewes, Saturday Review. Sherman Ewing, producer, was chairman.

The audience should be answering the forum's topic, not the speakers, Burrell declared. He believes that the past generations of theatre workers have proved that they do not know the answer. Thus it is about time the audience started telling the theatre what they would like to see, not vica versa. Various plans for spending large sums of money to start an American repertory company five or more years hence are discussions for never-never land, the English director-producer believes. Reminding the audience that Old Vic was founded on $200, he stated that there is no reason why a repertory company couldn't use the present ANTA Playhouse without spending one cent for reconstruction. Most theatre problems can be solved, Burrell noted, if the theatre realized the enormous vitality possible from an "Actor's Theatre." With the actor as the kingpin, everyone connected with the theatre would benefit.

Geraldine Page's solution is simply to have hundreds of little theatres all over the country producing like crazy. Star of Mid Summer, who moved uptown from the Circle in Square Summer and Smoke, traced her own background as an example of one of the many theatre people who do go out and make their own theatres.

The good old days of the American theatre are in the future, Blanche Yurka commented. Except for the Civic Repertory Theatre, US has had not theatre which actors can be proud of, she believes. Speaking frankly the star, who recently toured the country in her own one woman show, stated that S. Hurok's plan to raise $5 million for a US repertory theatre in NYC don't mean a thing. This country cannot have a national theatre, she noted, until theatre is nationwide. ANTA should take the lead, she urged, in organizing chapters in most cities of the country. These groups should raise funds to build a modern new theatre, all styled after the same design. This would enable the same production to be down across the country at the same time. The plans for the soon to be constructed Salt Lake City Playhouse are available from ANTA to any such group.

Repertory plans have failed in this country, Neva Patterson said, because the public was never interested enough in them. Until this country has the long cultural history that European countries have, such plans are impossible. One solution to the problem of bringing new people into the theatre, she suggested, is to put featured TV players into legitimate theatre productions. In her own play, The Seven Year Itch, Robert Emhardt has quite a following. Emhardt has played a heavy in many TV mystery stories and is better known to many in the audience than the regular Broadway players, she reported.

Several plans for new kinds of theatre production were outlined by Henry Hewes. Many producers firmly believe that S. Hurok's proposal to build a new theatre to house an American repertory company would be successful, Hewes informed the audience. Another discussed plan is Shepard Traube's "Salvage Theatre", which would continue werthwhile shows that weren't drawing large enough audiences. Via union concessions such a theatre, he explained, would be able to extend the run of these plays for several weeks. The comissioning of new plays by producers, much like is done in the music field, is another possibility worth consideration. Hewes is convinced that most drama critics will admit that the plays they liked best in any given year where the plays that did badly at the box office. To make matters worse, he concluded, the critic who liked these same plays, will also have to admit that his original notice predicted that they were non-commercial.